

Conference will compensate in some measure those who cannot go to Ambleside.

Miss Parish and Miss Harriet Smeeton have agreed to act as joint editors of the *Children's Quarterly*. We feel that the magazine will be in very capable hands, and we wish them every success in their work.

LILIAN GRAY.

LETTERS.

House of Education,
Ambleside,
November 28th, 1916.

MY DEAR "BAIRNS,"

Miss Gray's letter, telling me of the proposal to hold a Students' Conference held in the spring of 1917, interests me greatly.

In the first place, it is a long time since I have had the pleasure of seeing you. In the next, we are at a moment in the history of the P.N.E.U., when the energies of all its members are urgently needed, and the help of my dear "Bairns" will be expected on all sides. Two or three students have already written to the Office, asking how they can help; three more students are already in communication about elementary schools in their own neighbourhoods.

I want us all to be prepared with the same plan of campaign, so that we may all work together as one in this great forward movement, which means—have you realized it?—the education of the country, and perhaps of the Empire, for we have already had an inquiry for a large school in India.

I wish you could all go and see the Drighlington School

and what it has done in $2\frac{1}{2}$ years; but as that is not possible, I can only say that I am told it is like a fairy-tale, and that (in confidence) our P.N.E.U. Schools have a "blue tea-pot" to live up to!

I know you have all read, but have you all *studied* the three pamphlets? In No. 1 you will find a summary of teaching you know well, a summary that may help you to tabulate the points that must be dwelt on in talking of the matter to teachers. I enumerate them again in a still more concise form:

All children are persons of mind, and can deal with knowledge.

Therefore, children's minds must be allowed to work.

Therefore, self-education is the only form of education that can have any lasting value.

Children have an unlimited power of attention when they are not distracted by questions, the personality of the teacher or anything that comes between them and knowledge.

The teacher's concern is with the behaviour of mind. "The mind can know nothing except what it can put in the form of an answer to a question put by the mind to itself," and it works by, "What next? What next?" Narration is not *memory* work, but *mind* work, and cannot be accomplished without concentrated attention and consequent assimilation.

The addition which the Drighlington School has made to what the working of the method has established in other schools is that ALL children have these powers, not only children who come from cultivated homes. Also, the Drighlington children have excelled in the power of narration, narrating easily after the single reading of two or three pages.

I think your own teaching must be examined in the light of these facts, because your schoolrooms and classes will be

the cynosure of many eyes, and I know you will like to have a synopsis of propaganda work set before you, and therefore I am especially glad that it has been decided to have a conference here.

With much love to you all,—Your always affectionate friend,

CHARLOTTE M. MASON.

Scale How, Ambleside,

DEAR EX-STUDENTS,

The week before half-term was a time of great excitement. On Wednesday night Professor de Burgh arrived, and the fate of the worried Seniors was decided.

This year the gods were indeed kind, as nearly everyone had the lesson she wanted. As there were only fifteen Seniors, they received more individual attention than usual, and the lessons lasted until 12.30.

The rest of that day and the next were taken up with classes given by members of the staff and with language examinations. The Professor watched drill, balls, and dancing.

On the Friday, after all the horrors were over, we were rewarded by a most invigorating lecture on "The Teaching of History," given by Professor de Burgh. The lecture was not only a great joy, but also a real help to us who hope to teach history.

The Children's Evening was earlier this term on account of Mrs. Franklin's visit. The programme consisted of music in the time of the Stuarts and early Hanoverians. A larger number of children played than usual, and exceedingly well, touch and accuracy being especially noticeable. We sang

the Hymnus Eucharisticus, sung every May morning at 5 o'clock on Magdalen College Tower, also a carol, "The Holly and the Ivy."

We re-acted part of our Hallow E'en play for Mrs. Franklin, who afterwards gave us her impressions of the Drighlington School, which has been so much in our minds of late. To her it seemed like a fairy story; indeed, she made us believe that it was one—a true fairy story.

There are to be several changes on the staff.

All who know her will realize how sorry we are that Miss Willcock is leaving at Christmas. Miss C—— is to take her place. Owing to ill-health, Miss Curry was obliged to leave early this term, and has been terribly missed. Miss Millar has gone down to Fairfield in her stead. We are only consoled by the fact that she is still teaching up at College. Miss Boxshall, one of the present Seniors, is going to take on her work here next term.

Miss Parish was here a few days ago, a hurried visit, which she managed to fit in between her visits to the Bradford elementary schools. She told us about those which have taken up P.N.E.U. work, of the enthusiasm of the teachers, and the success of the method so far as it has been tried.

There have been very few drawing-room evenings this term: Browning, by Miss Spencer; Allegories, by Miss Robotham; Lord Roberts, by Miss Osborn. Also two musical evenings.

We were very fortunate in that Mr. Rawnsley gave us two evenings on Wordsworth.

The first was chiefly occupied with Wordsworth's early life. In connection with this he read extracts from the "Prelude," illustrating Wordsworth's views on education and life in general.

In the second we enjoyed his reading of the poet's most famous works.

The children did not act their usual play this term, so at the party the Juniors got up an exciting and mad charade, in which the children took part. An exhibition of waxworks, presented by Mrs. Jarley and her illiterate daughter Sally, was the next performance. After being wound up and oiled mechanical Jane swept the floor with terrifying vigour; Kennerly Rumford, when at last the right record was inserted, sang "The Rosary" in manly tones; a reciting doll held forth on Mary's Little Lamb in a miraculous manner, and the kiss which was to awake the Sleeping Beauty by a slight mismanagement failed to reach its destination! etc.

The children received Miss Mason's presents from the waxworks, each using its individual movement. After games and dancing a troupe of pierrots sang "The Frog." In the centre of the stage sat the afore-mentioned creature, composed of brown paper and paint. Other songs were to have been sung, but time did not permit.

We send, by request, one of the Hallow E'en poems:

A NATURE WALK.

(Composed with the help of various poets.)

The thirty students of Scale How
Set out one gloomy day.
They wept like anything to see
The bugs had gone away.
"If they weren't so shy," they said,
"We'd have a lovely day."

If we hunted everywhere,
And looked among the trees,
And if we searched the hedges out,
Or crawled upon our knees,
Don't you think we'd find a few?
O bugs, be generous, please!"

The way was steep, the road was rough,
The students were of enduring stuff;
Their sparkling eye and quickened gait
Seemed to bespeak an eager state.

Bug after bug lay hidden still;
They found nor flea nor beetle.
All sleepy as a sleepy bat
Asleep in a dark church steeple.

Students, students everywhere;
They covered all the ground.
Students, students everywhere;
But never a bug they found.

Not a sound was heard, not a boatman's wail,
As down to the water they hurried;
Not a scorpion showed as much as his tail
As on to the rocks they scurried.
When suddenly a cry arose,
A wondrous, joyous sound:
Three bugs, a bee and a fine water-flea
Were found when hunting around.

"Charge for the bottle," the finder said.
Was there a student dismayed?

But one picked them up by the tip of the toe
And dropped them in with a shudder—just so!
While all the rest wondered.

Home they brought the animals dead,
To paint in their leisure hours.
And as they entered someone said:
“Getting and spending we lay waste our powers;
Little time have we that is ours.
We have given our time away and yet
My heart leaps up when I behold
A bug of any kind;
For then my books with drawing fill
With notes on leaf and chlorophyll.”

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.—
Yours sincerely,

THE PRESENT STUDENTS.

Scale How, Ambleside,
December.

DEAR EDITOR,

The work of supplying specimens for nature lessons to the Council Schools in large towns working in the P.U.S. will soon become so interesting to ex-students and their pupils that I should like to let all know, by means of L'UMILE PIANTA, how it is being started. The following are some extracts from a circular letter sent to some dozen ex-students, inviting their co-operation: “You know, I expect, about the Council School at Drighlington, Bradford, Yorks, which is doing P.U.S. work, and showing so beautifully how it can

be done by a public elementary school with large classes of about 40 children.

“I went to see them working in July, and I want you to help them with their nature work. They use, of course, the same books as we do, and they love them. But for specimens they are very badly off; for though outside Bradford, Drighlington is a mining village, and nothing grows there.

“My idea, which Miss Mason approves, is to connect every form in such school with one or more of our ex-students and her pupils who live in a favoured neighbourhood, and get the latter to send week by week the plants which they gather to illustrate their own lessons.

“It will be necessary to stick a little slip of paper round the stalk of each kind of plant (or a number referring to a list of remarks) to say what it is, with a word or two about what it shows, *e.g.*, ‘Willow-herb seed vessel splitting into four, showing tufted seeds within,’ ‘Leaves of sow-thistle, showing the rounded auricle clasping the stem.’”

In the *Liberal Education* pamphlet No. 2 I gave, by Miss Mason's direction, a description of a criticism lesson, which showed how we use the natural history book together with the illustrative specimens or experiments. There have been books set in each form this term which *must* be illustrated in class by experiments of the things named. *Plant Life in Field and Garden* is the best example; the chapter on fruit in *Glimpses into Plant Life* is another. I should suggest that the ex-students should post a few specimens to the town-school when she prepares her own lesson, or else that the children in the home schoolroom should pack up the very examples they use, labelling them when the lesson is over. We did this after a lecture on the dispersion of seeds, and it was a not unnecessary exercise! Let me quote a letter from a head mistress who had received a box of berries and other

fruits, labelled to show their significance, which I sent her from Wiltshire:

"I have this morning received from you a parcel of specimens for nature study, etc., which is indeed a treasure-house of delight and information. Fortunately, we have an enthusiastic nature student on the staff, and I have made arrangements for every class in the school to share, at any rate in the pleasure, even though they may be unable to describe all the detailed knowledge. The arrival of your parcel is most opportune, for all the scholars are visiting the nearest park during last week and this, for the express purpose of noting the autumn aspect of trees and as much of the fruits and seeds of smaller plants as will come under their observation. Your parcel will undoubtedly supply many deficiencies, and we are all most sincerely glad that your kindly thoughts turned towards us."

It is splendid to think that we ex-students can give such pleasure to those who have not our opportunities. I wrote first to those who live in the west and south, because plants are likely to flourish there later and earlier than in other parts of the country. But now that there are some twenty Council Schools on the P.U. School register, I shall be very glad if anyone who feels inclined to undertake the work will write to me, and I shall hope to put her in communication with some teacher in the same form who is struggling to carry out Miss Mason's methods without the advantages of living in the country. So far, I have assigned twenty-two students to four schools, three in or near Bradford, Yorks, and one at Keighley. And I should like to impress on all the kind volunteers that the first necessity next term is to illustrate the books set on the programme; after that the subjects suggested for nature walks, and then to share any of their best finds, if they will travel by post. Letters should be

addressed to me here after January 16th, to save the trouble of forwarding.—Yours, etc.,

AGNES C. DRURY.

FRANCIS THOMPSON

Amid the howling of the unleashed dogs of war, a racket which bids fair to drown all else, he is a wise man who keeps his ears attuned to other and sweeter sounds and his mind open to consider the lessons of peace as well as the problems of war, welcoming each breath of softer air. It is in some such spirit as this that we may turn to the *Life of Francis Thompson*,* and follow it through its tortuous course; not that we shall find its pages free from struggle—far from it—but here we have another warfare, the warfare of the individual soul.

It is a platitude to say that all life is a struggle, but it is a platitude which takes on a new meaning when we study the lives of the poets. The old Welsh bards raised their voices in protest against intolerable wrongs; Milton fought with life as he found it; Shelley and Keats were in revolt against society; to read the story of Byron almost hurts us. Even Wordsworth had his struggle before he turned to nature for solace. "A poet," says Francis Thompson, "is one who endeavours to make the worst of both worlds." "The poet sows in sorrow that men may reap in joy." It is true; to the poet the pain, to the public the profit. And it must ever be so, indeed it is of the very essence of the poet's nature that he should be in conflict with the world and suffer from the conflict. For a poet is a man who sees visions, visions far in advance of his times, visions that carry him into a Utopia of

* *The Life of Francis Thompson*, by Everard Meynell. Burns & Oates Ltd.

his own creation where laws and restraints are not, where beauty casts its glamour over everything. Such a visionary life unfits for the real, and we have a man at war with the world, in revolt against society—a nature warped by the realization of the gulf between a conception of life as it should be and life as it is. "I slept and I dreamt that Life was Beauty, I woke . . ." And the inevitable outcome is wrecked lives—Byron, Burns, Shelley, Coleridge—and so it will be to the end, the poet, the man of dreams—the poet, the social outlaw.

Francis Thompson, then, was a poet, "one who endeavours to make the worst of both worlds." Born in December, 1859, he can never have been what is known as a "normal child." "Know you what it is to be a child?" he asks, and tells us, "It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear . . . it is

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour."

Childhood was tragic to Francis, yet with his family and his toys he was happy, and the home-life at Preston, and afterwards at Ashton-under-Lyne, would have contented a more normal nature. But this boy, who could see a world in a grain of sand, who "knew not as yet that he was under sentence of life," began his spiritual warfare early. The loneliness of human existence and the terrors conjured up by imagination appalled him at an age when other children are basking in happy ignorance. Always he seems to have been

hypersensitive to the bitterness of life. His experiences fostered this tendency, and his Roman Catholic upbringing did not counteract it.

After school-life at Ushaw, near Durham, Francis Thompson became an unsuccessful medical student at Owen's College, Manchester. In these years the pleasantest picture we have of him is as a cricket enthusiast. He saw good county matches at Old Trafford, and gloried in the successes of the Red Rose:

"The Lancashire Red Rose, O the Lancashire Red Rose!
We love the hue on her cheek that shows:
And it never shall blanch, come the world as foes,
For dipt in our hearts is the Lancashire Red Rose!"

His career as a medical student was not happy, and Dr. Thompson tried him at other tasks, but again he had to be written down a failure. In November, 1885, he disappeared.

In 1879, when ill, Francis Thompson had probably first tasted laudanum; during his early courses at Owen's College Mrs. Thompson had given him a copy of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*; before the end of his medical student's career he was spending money on opium. Unlike De Quincey, whose ardent champion he was, Francis Thompson had no great desire to justify his weakness, though at first he kept it secret. Misery does not imply sin, palliations are therefore legitimate—in some such words would he have repudiated guilt.

Of his two years on the London streets what can be said? The streets!

"the places infamous to tell
Where God wipes not the tears from any eyes."

The streets! full of "the fumes of congregated evil."

"Those horrible streets, with their gangrenous multitude blackening ever into lower mortifications of humanity."

Read Thompson's *In Darkest England*, and remember that the writer knew what it was to sleep on the Embankment and in doss-houses, to sell newspapers and matches for the sake of a few pence, to shiver in rags and starve in hopelessness. Read about the golden halfpennies, about the Rothschild florin, and remember that there was help at hand if the man had only stretched out for it, eager friends not knowing where to seek, money sufficient to free him for ever from the miseries of the underworld—but he would stand alone. And thus was a poet made.

In 1887 came the discovery and the rescue, and after that a life with friends. Now we watch Francis Thompson among his peers, now we can see of the travail of his soul. Another king has come into his kingdom, but it is a crippled king. Thompson was a slave to the opium habit.

Stimulated by intercourse with literary friends—Coventry Patmore and the Meynells were among the closest—Francis Thompson gave the world of his best, and it is very good. Prose and poetry alike roused a wondering public. Some little of what he had learnt in his life Thompson would teach others, somehow he must unburden an overlaid soul.

The year 1907 found him quite broken in health. Skilled care, advice, hospital, nothing could do more than temporarily relieve his sufferings, and he himself pronounced the verdict, "I am dying of laudanum poisoning." His words were true, he died at dawn on November 13th, 1907.

There must be few now who do not know *The Hound of Heaven*. It is published in a dainty parchment edition, and is much seen in drawing-rooms, and judged "very nice." It was an Irish priest who said that he had to read it six times before he could understand what the poem meant. Perhaps

his judgment at the end of the sixth reading was worth more than the drawing-room praises, for *The Hound of Heaven* is no parlour poem. Here we have voiced the dominating idea of a man's life, and it touches us very nearly:

"I fled Him down the nights and down the days,
I fled Him down the arches of the years."

The cry haunts. So did St. Augustine sense the omnipresence of God, "Thou wast driving me on with Thy good, so that I could not be at rest." And so the Psalmist, "If I climb up into heaven Thou art there, if I go down to hell Thou art there also." We almost seem to hear

"the following Feet
And a Voice above their beat,"

to taste "the pulp so bitter," and, in some degree, to understand the sweetness of that divine embrace which ends the chase.

"Ah! fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest,
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me."

With no other poem does Francis Thompson so completely enthrall, but he can always charm us away from earth's trodden paths, always like a magnet draw us after him, and always, too, it is upward, and "thus we go to the stars."

Thompson's essay on *Shelley*, at first rejected by the *Dublin Review*, is probably unequalled in the English language. "The most important contribution to English literature for twenty years" was Mr. George Wyndham's estimate of it. Charm, brilliance, music, they are all there. Even among Thompson's essays, and they are prose at its finest, it stands out as exquisite, arresting the mind and bewitching the ear. We are, indeed, in the presence of a master of

language; among essayists Francis Thompson yields place to none.

Appreciations are useless unless they encourage to further reading, that is their only object. They are certainly useless to those who have read for themselves. Sometimes they are worse than useless, so perhaps they ought to be avoided. Are we not told to drink deep, or not taste the spring? Very occasionally we brave all the dangers, and quite knowingly rush in, daring to tread and blundering on, and at least the motive of such rashness may be good—grateful ourselves, we would offer our tribute.

W.